

MIT announces new consensual relationships policy

Policy prohibits romantic, sexual relationships with power imbalance

By Emma Bingham and
Whitney Zhang
STAFF REPORTERS

Provost Martin Schmidt, Chancellor Cynthia Barnhart PhD '88, and Vice President for Human Resources Lorraine Goffe announced to the MIT community last Friday the release of MIT's new consensual relationships policy. The policy broadly bans any consensual sexual or romantic relationship between MIT faculty, staff, graduate student, or undergraduate student when one party holds authority over the other.

"Relationships based on asymmetries of power affect the entire

community and undermine our sense of fairness and integrity," David Singer, chair of the Committee on Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response (CSMPR), who led the policy's development, said in an interview with *The Tech*.

The policy bans all sexual or romantic relationships between faculty or staff and undergraduates. The policy also prohibits relationships between graduate and undergraduate students when one party has authority over the other, such as relationships between students and Graduate Resident Tutors or Teach-

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US gov. shutdown interrupts Course 1 IAP research project

Group had to relocate after Hawaii Volcanoes National Park was closed

By Sharon Chao
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

A government shutdown began midnight Jan. 20 and lasted three days before Congress passed a short-term spending bill to fund government operations through Feb. 8.

For MIT, the shutdown affected students doing field work at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, as part of the IAP research course Traveling Research Environmental Experiences (TREX). Offered by the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, TREX consists of one week of lectures and prep work at MIT, followed by a two week trip to Hawaii where they collect and analyze field sample data before publically presenting it.

TREX participants arrived in Ha-

waii the evening of Jan. 17 and started field work Jan. 19. According to lead instructor Professor Benjamin Kocar in an email to *The Tech*, they were originally staying at Kilauea Military Camp, which was inside the national park and close to their primary point of interest, Halemaumau Crater.

However, due to ongoing eruption at certain parts of Kilauea Volcano and the lapse in government funding, portions of Volcanoes National Park were closed for visitor safety. The TREX group was evicted Jan. 22 and had to relocate to a small house in Volcano. "It is generally working well for us, albeit re-packing and unpacking our field equipment and mobile laboratory consumed at least a day,

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FIONA CHEN—THE TECH

MIT economics professor Daron Acemoglu speaks about populism and the rise of Trump.

Economics professors present at 'State of the Union' symposium

Panels cover social policy, financial regulation, and populism

By Jessica Shi
ASSOCIATE NEWS EDITOR

The Department of Economics hosted a "State of the Union" symposium Wednesday. The event comprised of three panel discussions that focused on major policy issues in the Trump era.

"Professor Marios Angeletos suggested the department organize an event to allow the MIT community to hear from scholars who have been studying these [economic policy] issues, sometimes for decades," Department Head Nancy Rose wrote in an email sent to *The Tech*.

"We hope this gives our community a better understanding of facts and research that bear what's being said and written in the popular realm; and to hear from some of the people who have been involved in policy making in these spaces," Rose continued.

Social policy

The first panel, titled "Social Policy: Taxation, Health Care and

Social Security," consisted of Professors Amy Finkelstein, Jon Gruber, and Jason Poterba; Professor Emeritus Peter Diamond; and Harvard Professor Jason Furman.

Poterba and Furman presented their analyses of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA), which was signed into law Dec. 22.

"Many of you, depending on which media outlets you read, probably heard that this was just a gigantic giveaway to the rich, and that was the best you could say about this tax reform," Poterba said. "The first thing I'm going to say is that that's not true."

Instead, Poterba argued, the TCJA was informed by a delineable set of motivations. In particular, corporate tax cuts could allow U.S. firms to be more competitive in the global market.

Throughout the past several decades, the U.S. has maintained a fairly stable federal corporate tax rate of around 35 percent, according to Poterba. But whereas this

number once fell in the lower end of the global spectrum, the distribution has shifted over time, and today, the U.S.'s rate is now significantly above the worldwide average of 22 percent.

The TCJA lowers the corporate tax rate to 21 percent. However, Poterba continued, that may be taking it too far. Smaller subsets of countries that the U.S. is a part of, such as G7 and G20, have average corporate tax rates much closer to the U.S.'s former rate (29.6 percent and 28 percent, respectively).

Poterba also addressed the "very high-end tilt" of these reforms: according to the Congressional Budget Office's allocation, most of the burden of corporate taxes lie with the owners of corporate capital — that is, the shareholders; naturally, then, these will also be the groups that benefit the most from the corporate tax cuts.

Furman's assessment of the

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Prof. Eric Lander named likely shortlist candidate for Harvard pres., Lander expects to remain at MIT

Harvard Medical School Dean George Daley named Eric Lander, MIT biology professor and Broad Institute president, as a candidate who is "almost certainly" on the shortlist for Harvard's next president, *The Harvard Crimson* reported earlier this month.

Daley did not have "direct knowledge of the search, though he has been formally and informally consulted by the

search committee," *The Crimson* continued.

"I was surprised to learn that speculation by someone who said they had no knowledge of the process was even being reported," Lander wrote in an email to *The Tech* Sunday. "For my part, I fully expect to be teaching 7.012 at MIT next fall and continuing to be doing science!"

The current shortlist is expect-

ed to contain fewer than 20 names.

Lander was also named as one of the scientists in consideration to be added to the list of finalists for Harvard president in 2007, according to previous coverage by *The Crimson*. That search process ended with the selection of Drew Faust, Harvard's current president and an American historian, who will step down in June 2018.

— Jessica Shi

IN SHORT

Registration for third quarter P.E. classes opens Wednesday, Jan. 31 at 8 a.m.

Registration for spring semester classes opens Monday, Jan. 29.

There is no single add/drop date for IAP, but students may not drop subjects after submitting the final assignment or examination. Students should submit online add/drop forms to make registration changes.

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KEEPING UP WITH THE ATHLETES

What's happening this week with MIT sports teams? **SPORTS, p. 12**

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Maybe I should return to the meal plan. **CAMPUS LIFE, p. 8**

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We must set a price on carbon before it makes us pay. **OPINION, p. 4**



SIR? MA'AM?

Making peace with gender in this week's Plus Plus column. **CAMPUS LIFE, p. 8**

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Why we need nuance in our conversations about sexual assault. **OPINION, p. 4**

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WEATHER

Oscillating weather continues

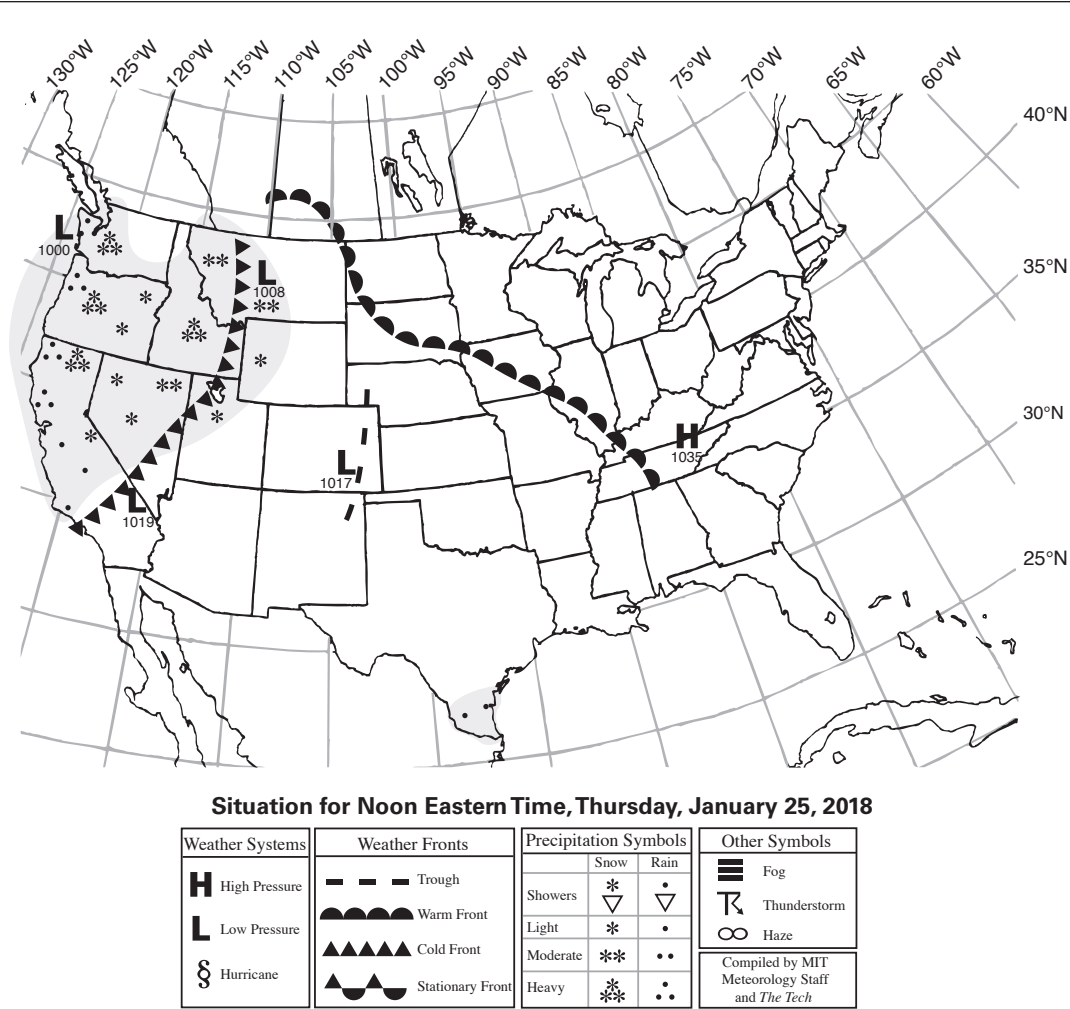
By Sarah Weidman

The northeast has experienced an interesting oscillation of temperature and precipitation this winter, and this week was no different. Temperatures warmed up after the cold end of last week, and are expected to rise again after today's cold spell. The heavy rainstorm earlier this week will be followed by several days of sun, but expect another wet few days starting on Sunday as a low pressure system rolls in from the south. Depending on the temperature, this system could result

in snow later next week. Meanwhile, in other parts of the country, north Texas experienced its first tornadoes of the year this past week. At least twenty homes were destroyed by a tornado in a city in northeast Texas, and several other twisters were recorded in the surrounding area. Tornadoes can occur all winter in the Deep South, but due to the cold, dry winter in the area so far, these were some of the first few tornadoes since mid-December. Tornado season will be here in full force in just a few months.

Extended Forecast

Today: Partly Sunny. High around 25 °F (-4 °C). Northwest winds at 10-15 mph.
Tonight: Mostly Clear. Low around 17 °F (-8 °C). Northwest winds at 10-15 mph.
Tomorrow: Sunny. High around 31 °F (-1 °C) and low around 18 °F (-8 °C). Northwest winds at 5-10 mph.
Saturday: Partly Sunny. High around 48 °F (9 °C) and low around 31 °F (-1 °C).
Sunday: Cloudy, with a high chance of rain. High around 46 °F (8 °C).



Policy applies to prior relationships as well

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ing Assistants. Faculty and staff are prohibited from relationships with graduate students if they are in any position of power over the students. Furthermore, supervisors and mentors, such as Principal Investigators, are prohibited from relationships with those they supervise. CSMPR also met with MIT's professional education programs to ensure that the policies would be equally applicable to online learners and instructors of open online classes. The policy only applies to professors who have "academic authority" over the students in their online classes, Singer said. This distinction was made because many of these online instructors only provide lectures and materials but do not have authority over students. Regarding the policy's enforcement, Singer emphasized that first and foremost, it is "up to members of the community to know what the rules are." According to MIT's Human Resources website, supervisors are required to "put in place adequate alternative supervisory arrangements once they have knowledge of a policy violating relationship." Singer also said that outside parties like HR, the Title IX Office, and Violence Prevention and Response can be contacted to help enforce this policy. In an email last November, President L. Rafael Reif emphasized the need for a "baseline of sound policies against harassment" and studying and strengthening policies

where necessary. The policy revision was first brought up in CSMPR in Spring 2016. Previously, MIT only had a conflict of interest policy which "simply noted that sexual relationships could prompt conflicts of interest," Singer said, but did not provide details or guidance. According to Singer, interest first sparked when CSMPR and MIT administration recognized that MIT, unlike all of its peer institutions, did not have a consensual relationships policy. In 2016, CSMPR, a 32-member committee of undergraduates, graduates, faculty, and staff, began working with the Provost, Chancellor, HR department, Office of the General Counsel, and Marianna Pierce, the lead policy drafter for MIT employment policies, to draft the policy. The group sought feedback from Faculty Officers, Heads of House, the GRT Council, the Dean's Group, the Graduate Student Council, a group of EECS graduate and undergraduate TAs, the Faculty Policy Committee, and the Academic Council. GSC President Sarah Goodman G wrote to *The Tech* on behalf of the GSC officers that they were "pleased to see that the administration is taking the matter of the conflict of interest arising from consensual relationships seriously." Goodman wrote that they were happy to see their feedback was taken into account, including "the definition of 'academic authority' [which] is broad enough to cover 'participating in decisions on academic status,' which covers qualifying exams decisions, and 'participat-

ing in decisions on funding or other resources affecting students,' which cover cases impacting a graduate student's ability/authorization to use lab funds for research." Goodman also highlighted that the policy "covers *prior* relationships as well as current." For example, if faculty or staff had had a prior relationship with a graduate student, he or she is not allowed to exercise authority on that graduate student. However, Goodman was cautious to remark on the effects of this policy. "Of course, as with any policy, what will matter more than the policy on paper will be its enforcement," Goodman wrote. "We hope that no adverse effects will come from parties willfully misinterpreting the policy." Mark Goldman G, a staff reporter for *The Tech*, pointed out that while he supports this policy, it may create problems for students who may already be or were previously in relationships with their thesis advisors. Students may have to switch advisors and thus restart their thesis, according to Goldman. Singer was hesitant to comment on this hypothetical situation but stated that it was the faculty member's responsibility to manage this potential conflict of interest. CSMPR will continue to work on this policy as well as other programs, such as. Singer encouraged feedback on this policy and other policies for future policy revisions. Other tasks include Title IX training for current faculty and staff who have not yet received training and the drafting a sexual misconduct policy.

Mayor corrects 'misinformation' on Trader Joe's, says property owners intend to keep store open

Cambridge Mayor Marc McGovern, who wrote to *The Tech* in an emailed statement Jan. 15 that he had heard the Trader Joe's on Memorial Drive would "have to leave" due to redevelopment of the area by Kimco Realty, updated his position Jan. 18. "It appears I may have received some misinformation. I am so glad Kimco has decided to keep Trader Joe's in Cambridge! They have become a staple in our community," McGovern tweeted Jan. 18. His comment was in response to a tweet by Karleigh Moore G, chairman of *The Tech*, which linked to *The Tech's* article on the possibility of Trader Joe's closing. "I had heard from community sources that the Trader Joes [sic] / Microcenter property on Memorial Drive had been sold and was going to be redeveloped, resulting in Trader Joes having to close. I have since become aware via a statement by the new property owners that the information I had was incorrect and that Trader Joes will not close," McGovern wrote in an email to *The Tech* Jan. 18. "This is good news as the loss of this market would negatively impact the Cambridge-

port neighborhood specifically and the City as a whole," McGovern continued. Jennifer Maisch, Director of Corporate Communications at Kimco Realty, wrote in an email to *The Tech* Jan. 17 that "there are no plans for Trader Joe's to close" and that "there are no formalized plans [for the redevelopment of Memorial Plaza] at this time." *Editor's note:* The Tech noted this discrepancy between McGovern and Maisch's information in its original coverage, after informing McGovern of Maisch's statement and asking for clarification on what the reason for it might be and what his sources were. McGovern's response was quoted in part in the original article and is included in full here: "My information came from community sources who said that the site was being redeveloped. I'm sorry but I have given you all the information I can about this. I was told that the site was being redeveloped and Trader Joe's was closing. That is why I made that statement." McGovern did not re-classify his original statement as "misinformation," as he later did in his tweet, at the time. — Jessica Shi

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MIT precincts see significant voter increase in 2017 Cambridge local elections

MITVote2017 group formed to engage students in politics

By Mark Goldman
STAFF REPORTER

Since the 2016 presidential election, there has been a rise in political activity at MIT. Some of the initiatives, like Solidarity MIT, the MIT Women’s March Liaisons, and the Graduate Student Council’s ‘Call Your Congressman’ campaign, oppose specific Republican-backed initiatives in government. Other efforts, like the student-run MITVote2017, strive to increase student participation in government without an official stance on policy issues.

In November 2017, Cambridge held City Council and school board elections. These local elections typically have lower overall turnout and dramatically lower student turnout than the well-publicized presidential elections. Some students saw this election as an opportunity to engage the student body in local politics and formed MITVote2017. The group consisted of approximately ten active organizers, as well as graduate and undergraduate liaisons who helped spread information to departments and dorms.

Leading up to the election, MITVote2017 put up posters with graphs highlighting the lack of student representation in Cambridge local elections. It organized voter registration drives at MIT libraries and broadcasted information about the polling locations and candidates, in order to lower potential student voting barriers. On election day, MITVote2017 ran a booth to educate voters about the candidates and the ranked choice voting process.

After the election, Davi da Silva G, the chair of MITVote2017, analyzed the change in voter turnout from the 2015 local election to gauge the effectiveness of MITVote2017’s work.

In Cambridge as a whole, the number of voters increased by 40%, from about 16,000 in 2015 to about

22,500 in 2017, according to da Silva. For voters under 30, the turnout more than doubled.

The Cambridge precincts with the largest increases in voter turnout were the two that encompass most of MIT’s residence halls, according to da Silva. Precinct 2-2, which includes west campus dorms, experienced a 250% increase. Precinct 2-3, which includes East Campus, 70 Amherst, Eastgate, and non-student housing, experienced an 85% increase.

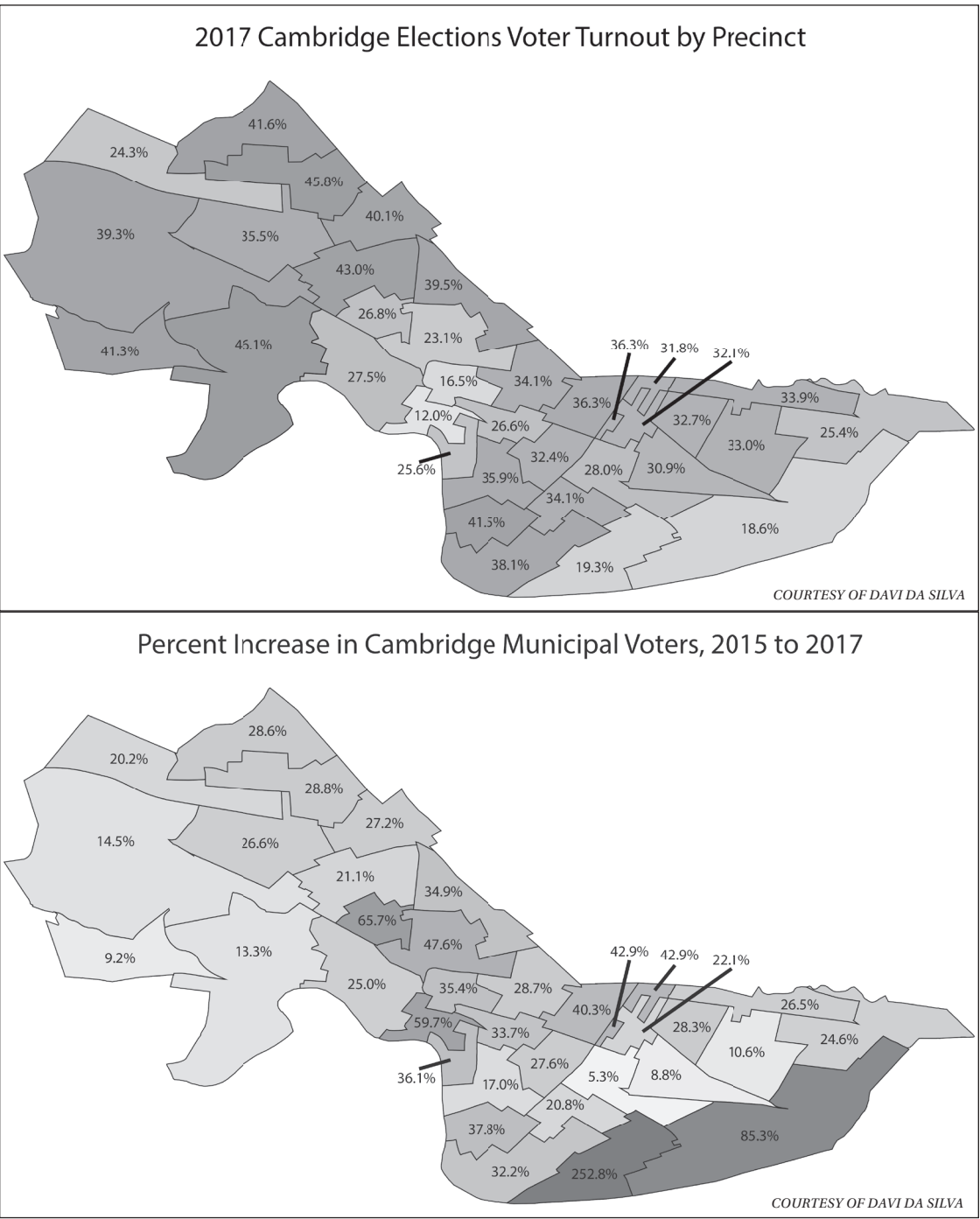
When asked if the increase in the number of voters was due to MITVote2017, da Silva wrote in an email to *The Tech*, “As with most social science observations, it’s tricky to prove causality. But given the trends ... we’re fairly confident in the impact of our work.”

Harvard student Nadya Okamoto’s ’20 run for City Council may have also affected voter turnout. Okamoto obtained the most first choice rankings of any candidate in the MIT precincts 2-2 and 2-3 and Harvard precinct 8-3.

However, MIT students were still greatly underrepresented. MIT precincts 2-2 and 2-3, along with Harvard precincts 7-3 and 8-3, had the four lowest voter turnout rates in Cambridge. In the 2017 election, more retirees voted than students, despite the fact that there are four times as many students in the Cambridge voter database.

Da Silva also broke down the data by living group. Among MIT undergraduate dorms in Cambridge, East Campus had the most voters (57), followed by Simmons (33), and Burton-Conner (30). Graduate dorms generally had lower turnouts, with Westgate topping the list at 23 voters, followed by Sidney-Pacific with 14.

For the next election, MITVote2017 plans to lead more initiatives, such as a dorm competition to encourage voter turnout.



Individual mandate repeal essentially shrinks ACA into ‘entitlement program,’ Prof. Gruber says

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TCJA was far more critical.

“There’s a lot of different ways to judge a public policy. I tend to be pretty unabashedly about judging it in terms of the consequences it has for people,” Furman began wryly, to the chuckles of his co-panelists.

“If you take just about any metric of inequality that we have, after-tax inequality would be higher as a result of this legislation rather than lower,” Furman said, and the disparities would get worse as time goes on. (The TCJA contains several provisions that will expire or change.)

Shifting away from Poterba’s emphasis on statutory tax rates, Furman evaluated the TCJA’s impact on effective marginal tax rates instead, concluding that it would lead to around 10 percent less R&D (research and development) output.

Gruber spoke on the current status and future prospects of U.S. health insurance.

Gruber was “a key architect of the 2006 Massachusetts healthcare reform” (Romneycare), panel moderator Finkelstein explained, and he also “worked with the Obama administration and the Congress in crafting the 2010 Affordable Care Act” (Obamacare).

Gruber first addressed the recent attempts to dismantle the ACA.

The TCJA repeals the individual mandate portion of the ACA, but this has an ironic effect, Gruber argued. Premiums will skyrocket, which will drive those who can no longer afford health insurance out

of the market. But many of the people who gained health insurance through the ACA are subsidized such that they only pay a fixed percentage of their income, regardless of how high the premiums are — so they will remain relatively unharmed.

In other words, removing the individual mandate essentially “shrink[s] the ACA to an entitlement program for low income people,” Gruber said.

For the long term, Gruber emphasized the importance of remaining humble and patient: humble, since no one actually understands how to control healthcare costs without reducing healthcare quality, so experimentation is necessary; patient, since the problem of rising healthcare costs does not have to be solved immediately, or even within the next decade, as the U.S. economy is robust enough to devote a significant percentage of its GDP (“we could easily spend 25 percent,” Gruber said) to support healthcare programs.

Financial regulation

The second panel, “Financial (De) Regulation,” was composed of MIT Professors Kristin Forbes, Deborah Lucas, and Ricardo Caballero; Visiting Professor Chester Spatt; and Harvard Professor Jeremy Stein.

Since the 2007 financial crisis, there has been a substantial shift in financial regulatory policy, according to Forbes.

This shift included a general realization that simply having monetary policy (keeping inflation under control through a central bank) and microprudential policy

(ensuring individual financial institutions have sufficient capital) were not enough, Forbes said. Instead, a third “M” also needed to be expanded: macroprudential policy, or the “oversight of the entire financial system.”

However, while macroprudential policy “can accomplish certain goals,” it can also lead to unintended consequences, Forbes continued. Before such regulation is implemented, a cost-benefit analysis — the topic of Spatt’s presentation — can be used to weigh the risks.

“Cost-benefit analysis, potentially, is about bringing economic analysis to bear and trying to think about regulation sensibly, or at least that’s what it should be,” Spatt explained. “Just measuring things differently can actually have huge differences in policy.”

Lucas spoke on housing finance reform, citing the housing market bubble and meltdown as “ground zero” of the 2008 financial crisis. There has been “little progress on regulatory reform,” Lucas said. Although there have been a handful of promising bipartisan bills (the Corker-Warner Housing Finance Reform and Taxpayer Protection Act, introduced in 2013, for example), several key legislators have retired or are retiring, and even centrist proposals are often subjected to criticisms from both the right and the left, according to Lucas.

The rise of populism

The third and final panel, “Populism on the Rise: Causes and Consequences,” was composed of MIT Professors Daron Acemoglu, John Van Reenen, and James Snyder; Professor Emeritus Michael

Piore; and Harvard Professor Dani Rodrik.

The panelists discussed various sources of the recent rise in populism, both in the U.S. with the election of Donald Trump and the candidacy of Bernie Sanders, as well as with the Brexit vote.

Manifestations of populism range from obvious examples like economic grievances to broader social and political trends, such as a general loss of trust in government institutions and heightened tensions between different societal groups, especially along racial lines, Acemoglu said.

Rodrik examined historical populist movements (the U.S. People’s Party, for example) and their correlation with globalization patterns. Rodrik also noted the differences between left-wing populism, characterized by income and social class cleavage, and right-wing populism, characterized by ethno-national and cultural cleavage.

Snyder emphasized the importance of “young people” as an underrepresented voting bloc. Young voters supported Clinton much more than Trump; Democrats much more than Republicans; and pro-immigrant views much more than anti-immigrant views, Snyder said, but their political influence is severely limited by low voter turnout rates.

In addition to individual presentations, each panel also included some discussion among panelists, as well as a question-and-answer session with the audience at the end.

Fiona Chen and Whitney Zhang contributed reporting.

Government shutdown

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and we’re now doing our best to perform chemical measurements, etc. in a non-ideal location,” Kocar said.

The delays caused by the government shutdown, coupled with heavy rain Jan. 23, have disrupted the group’s planned research timeline. “The unexpected relocation has put us behind schedule and the resulting constant crunchtime feeling has not been pleasant,” Joseph Noszek ’20 said in an email to *The Tech*. The students will give a public talk about their data analysis in Kona this Monday Jan. 29.

MIT’s Lincoln Laboratory, which advances technology for national security and works with departments and agencies across the federal government, was “indirectly impacted by limited ability to interface with Government sponsors who have been furloughed, and certain contracting and financial functions that have been suspended,” according to a press release. C. Scott Anderson, assistant director of operations, declined to specify the government sponsors.

Fortunately, the lab prepared for the shutdown beforehand. “The Lincoln Laboratory Finance Department coordinated with their Government counterparts to accelerate invoicing and maximize the amount of cash available for Laboratory operations,” Anderson wrote in an email to *The Tech*.

A short-term spending bill was passed Jan. 23 and extends funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program for six years, but does not include concrete action on the issue of immigration.



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Emma Bingham '19

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We must set the price on carbon

Climate change is projected to cost my generation over \$8.8 trillion in lifetime income. This means, if no action is taken to reduce carbon pollution, a 21-year-old today could be poorer by \$126,000 in their lifetime. Even without school closures interfering with students' educations, there is no amount of studying or hard work that can prepare millennials for the massive financial burden that we will inherit.

A price on carbon accounts for the health and environmental costs of fossil fuels and would level the playing field in the energy industry and encourage both businesses and consumers to transition

Claire Halloran is a undergraduate at MIT studying materials science and engineering. She is a student leader in the MIT Energy Club.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

IM T-shirts are a misogynistic microaggression

This past fall, I began my first semester at MIT as a PhD candidate in the Chemical Engineering Department. I joined the department’s C level intramural basketball team and looked forward to returning to a sport I loved in a fun, low-pressure environment. One game, we arrived and met our opponents: a team of undergraduates — all men — called the Burton Third Bombers, all wearing matching orange shirts. On the back of each shirt, each player had their own nickname. Almost all were vulgar. Some were mostly inoffensive, though gross and unnecessary: “Autofellatio,” “Fuck o’ the Irish,” and “FLPenis.” But some were downright disgusting and misogynistic, such as “Pig Fucker” and “Alyssa Blows Me.” We have since seen more around campus: “Blackout Blowjob” and “Pussy Paranoia.”

When I first saw the shirts, I was shocked and infuriated. I expressed my feelings to my teammates and waited until the end of the game to approach the other team. After we finished playing, I pulled one of the oppos-

ing players aside, and a few of his teammates lingered around us to listen. I told them the shirts were offensive and unwarranted, and while they seemed like decent people, it was not reflected in these shirts. They never said “sorry,” but rather mumbled some “ok’s” and walked away. After the game, a group of them were exiting the building and did not realize I was walking behind them. I overheard them laughing about how funny the shirts were and how much they loved wearing them.

Our team reported the incident to Title IX. We then received an apology email from their team. They said they were “...deeply apologetic” and acknowledged that they previously had not considered “...how [the shirts] might make others feel.” But they also said, “From now on we’re going to encourage all members of the floor to think critically about wearing their shirts out in public.” They obviously missed the point of our complaint entirely. The shirts should be thrown out; there is no appropriate situation in which they are acceptable to wear. I was then extremely angry to see that the floor continued to wear the shirts during the intramural three-on-three league during IAP and around the MIT campus.

These students were given ample opportunities to learn from the experience and to eradicate the problem. First, when I spoke

to them; then, when they apologized; and finally, in their future games. In all three instances, they failed to properly apologize, did not attempt to even remotely understand the issue and the consequences of their actions, and chose not to end the behavior moving forward.

While the word has been twisted by some due to its copious use over recent years, this is a prime example of a microaggression. I came to have fun while playing a meaningless basketball game, but instead, I had to play side-by-side with these boys wearing misogynistic T-shirts, all while they laugh about it. Imagine how a person who has been a victim of sexual misconduct might react in the presence of a person wearing these T-shirts. More specifically, what about the impact on this hypothetical person’s performance on an exam after having just seen the T-shirts? We must recognize the fundamental power play these men are using by wearing these shirts, a power play for which I cannot think of an equivalent that women could wield if they even wanted to.

I am disappointed in the GRTs, professors, and peers of these students who have allowed these shirts to be worn for months, if not longer. There have been many initiatives and much work done on an administrative level at MIT to foster an atmosphere of diversity and inclusion, but instances

like these threaten the progress that has been made. Such microaggressions are not unique to MIT. Issues relating to misogyny, patriarchal power structures, heteronormativity, and sexism are all on the forefront of international conversation. Instances like these — while they may seem minor or harmless — are both products and foundations of larger actions and overall societal problems of this nature.

MIT is obviously a very stressful environment for its entire community, and I believe that the extremely demanding nature of the academics and work prevents many of us from deeply engaging in extracurriculars devoted to topics such as race, gender, or socioeconomic equality. I urge students to think critically about their environment and the world at large, and hopefully conclude that many of these issues deserve their attention despite their busy lives. Starting clubs (and supporting those that exist), bringing in speakers, and just having more conversations about these difficult topics can do a lot. And while it is a whole topic of its own, I urge the administration to think deeply about what kind of people — not just students or researchers — they want their institution to produce and how the environment they have created is supporting or hindering holistic qualities and advances beyond STEM.

— Kara Rodby

STAFF COLUMN

Why the Aziz Ansari story and discussions of grey areas are central to the #MeToo movement

To develop more nuanced understandings of consent and prevent sexual assault, we need to discuss grey areas

By **Fiona Chen**
STAFF WRITER

Stories like that of Grace and Aziz Ansari are central to the fight against sexual assault and for gender equality.

Their story is one that is all too common. It begins with some flirting and a date, through which Ansari develops an expectation for sex, while Grace does not. It ends with Grace feeling disrespected and violated for having all of her signals and statements of discomfort towards sex ignored.

The piece has created a relatively large rift in the #MeToo movement. While many people have expressed support for Grace, many others have called the story detrimental to the movement’s momentum or stated that it demonstrates the “excesses” of the movement in punishing innocent men. They have expressed sympathy for Aziz Ansari for failing to fully comprehend Grace’s “mixed signals” and claimed that the account doesn’t even approach sexual assault.

People’s negative responses to the piece demonstrate that our society faces a deep issue, where people understand sexual assault in solely the most extreme terms and fail to recognize more quotidian forms of gendered violence.

It is easy for us to condemn the most egregious individuals for the most obviously non-consensual acts of sexual violence, such as Harvey Weinstein for raping multiple of his female co-workers or Kevin Spacey for making pedophilic advances towards multiple young men. Grace’s story, however, demonstrates that a grey area exists in sexual assault and that violence within this grey area has become highly normalized. The fact that many people found that they could relate to Ansari and consequently jumped to call his actions ordinary, while many others

found that they could relate to Grace and shared similar stories demonstrates this normalization.

A lot of this normalization stems from our limited understandings of coercion. It’s important to realize that coercion can operate subtly, and doesn’t necessarily require direct physical actions or spoken threats. Rather, sexual violence stems most naturally from power imbalances produced by social norms and structures. Those power imbalances are deeply intertwined with gender stereotypes that teach men to be aggressively masculine rather than empathetic and teach women to be docile rather than outspoken. They result from the administrative control that established workplace bosses like Weinstein may hold over their new employees and the social status that famous celebrities like Ansari or Spacey may hold over their fans.

It is easy to say “no” and walk away from uncomfortable situations in theory, but it is not nearly as easy to do so in practice, particularly in situations in which one individual wields large amounts of power over the other. The people who call on Grace to speak out more about her own desires clearly fail to recognize that, all throughout their lives, women have been imbued with messages from the media and their bosses and their peers that they cannot do so. As Anna North describes in her article, this stigma is particularly true for women regarding romantic relationships and sex. Women are slut shamed for pursuing too much sex and labelled as prudes for pursuing too little. During sex itself, male pleasure always takes precedence and female pleasure is almost seen as an afterthought. Men are taught that women saying “no” are really playing hard to get, and women who firmly do say “no” often face horrible consequences.

Consistently, however, Grace and other women with similar stories are told that they have not experienced “real” sexual assault and that the mere act of sharing their stories trivializes more “serious” incidents of sexual violence. These responses seem horribly misguided. The people who are calling out Aziz Ansari aren’t equating his actions with those of Weinstein, Spacey, or any of the other individuals who have been accused (or convicted) of sexual assault. Each of these individual stories adds more nuance to the broader #MeToo movement about the avenues through which sexual assault can occur.

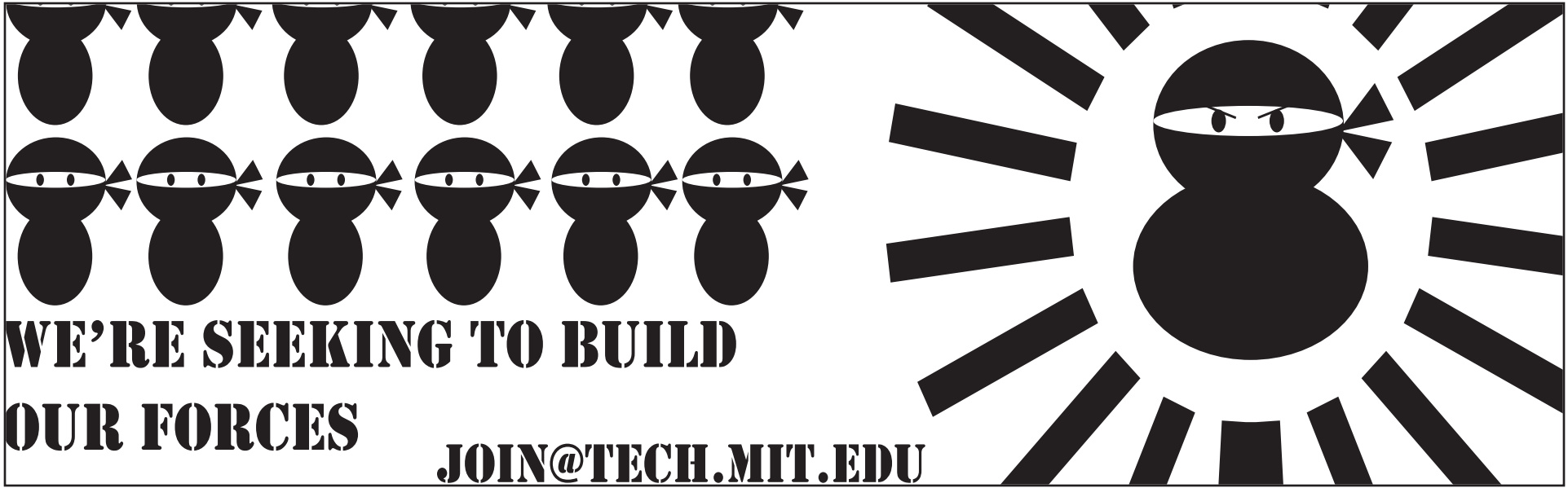
Solely condemning the most extreme instances of sexual assault is insufficient. It means that, at best, we punish some of the worst criminals in society. However, unless we are willing to also condemn the people like Ansari, who may not necessarily cross legal lines into sexual assault but clearly fail to fully consider their partners’ comfort, we will never create a positive culture around sex in which all parties can find pleasure. Feminist efforts to prevent rape and sexual assault are necessary, but insufficient. We need to broaden our goal to actively promoting comfort in sex, as the majority of people most likely will never become rapists or sexual assaulters in the way that we’re defining these terms now, but many people have been in situations similar to that of Grace and Ansari.

A first step towards combating this subtler form of sexual violence is to define consent as affirmative — as a freely given, continuous “yes.” This definition creates a far clearer brightline for sexual violence that can eliminate a lot of issues with the existing grey area. Consequently, as Jaclyn Friedman argues in her article, we should be teaching this definition in sex ed programs at schools.

In the context of Grace’s story, affirmative consent would mean that Ansari actively asks Grace whether or not she is comfortable with having sex rather than waiting for her to interject and say “no.” The former action promotes a healthy relationship in which both parties can find satisfaction, while the latter makes miscommunication and discomfort highly likely.

Redefining consent obviously begs the question of how we should punish the multitudes of people who will newly fit the banner of “sexual assaulters.” However, the answer to that question is still rather unclear. My gut tells me that this question isn’t nearly as pressing as people are making it out to be. There are obviously flaws in our criminal justice system that make legal solutions to sexual assault insufficient and problematic, the most obvious ones being that sexual assault survivors rarely report their cases due to a lack of evidence or a fear of dragging out their pain, and that any new laws will likely be disproportionately applied to black populations.

For now, our focus should be on socially transforming the way we understand sexual violence. We need to listen to the people coming forward in the #MeToo movement and hold more nuanced discussions of consent and sexual violence within our schools and our workplaces. Gendered violence is not solely a question of legal structures, but rather has been written into the fabric of our society — it is ingrained in the stereotypes that we recall while buying clothes or writing scripts for movies and in the sex ed models that teach abstinence over proper protection. In order to truly create an equal society, we need to more deeply examine the patriarchal power relations and social norms at play which make gendered violence possible.



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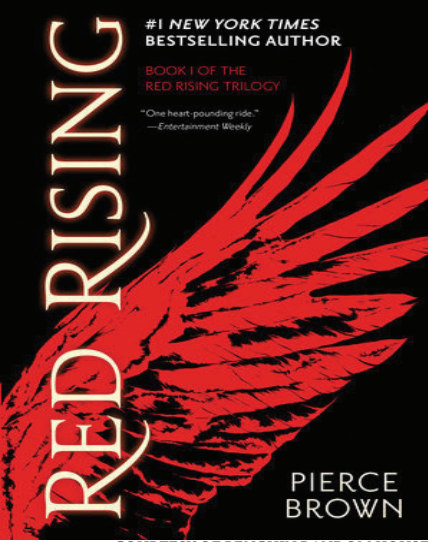
EMAIL US

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BOOK REVIEW

The first contemporary dystopian series that didn't make me cringe!

In fact, I think I might soon join the *Red Rising* fandom



COURTESY OF PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE
Red Rising by Pierce Brown.

By Karleigh Moore
EDITOR

I discovered *Red Rising*, the first book of the *Red Rising* series, the same way I discover most books nowadays: Google Play Books suggestions. I read the synopsis, and it reminded me of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and of various contemporary, young adult dystopian novels. Don't get me wrong, YA dystopian books are very hit-or-miss, and it seems to be hard to come up with something new in this genre despite what would seem near infinite possibilities. I digress.

The teaser blurb had me interested

enough, and I had a \$5-off coupon, so I decided that that was good enough for me.

It turns out *Red Rising* was well-written, original, and not too cliché. To my delight, the book doesn't seem to be written mainly for a YA audience, despite the popularity of the dystopian YA genre. There's a fair amount of violence and cursing, so I wouldn't actually classify this as YA anyway. To put things on some sort of scale, the prose and story complexity far exceeds *The Hunger Games*, but it is definitely less sophisticated than *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

The setting is the somewhat distant future in the Milky Way. Humans have, predictably, let global warming get bad enough that we got the heck off of Earth and began to colonize other local planets and moons.

Though the story is heavily plot-driven, the characters and their relationships are complex, and Brown spends a sufficient amount of time and dialogue to fully develop them.

I sympathized with the main character, Darrow, right away. He's a Red, society's laboring lowest class. Darrow and his fellow Reds drill away in mines deep below the surface of Mars, collecting materials to help terraform Mars. They believe they work for the benefit humanity, which they think is trapped on a dying Earth waiting for the surface Mars to be habitable; if only things were that simple.

There's a *Hunger Games*-esque feature of life for Reds. They are divided into clans based on the mines they drill in, and they compete for "The Laurel" which contains

luxury items like blankets and food that isn't gruel. I was worried that the story was going to be a copycat at this point, but I kept reading.

We quickly discover that the Reds are being fed lies by the Golds, the elite ruling class of humanity. I'll keep the details of the lie and the truth obscure, because discovering the truth along with Darrow was one of the most enjoyable parts of this book. Let's just say there's more at play than terraforming planets, and it involves an entire galaxy of complex politics and class warfare.

Darrow is recruited by the Sons of Ares, an underground resistance group that rebels against the Golds and the class structure. Let's just say they send him to the surface of Mars on a very special mission, which requires him to grow and change in extreme ways.

Darrow is a great character, and he reminded me of Ender Wiggin in *Ender's Game*: a brilliant kid sucked out of his own world and subsumed into something bigger than he can possibly conceive of. There are even "Battle School"-esque trials that Darrow has to go through, which are both exciting and gruesome to read about.

In an above-the-surface world that's practically alien to him, Darrow has to figure out who he can trust. He isn't always as wise as I hoped (you know, for his own sake), but he is endearingly earnest, and often thinks with his heart. Darrow is betrayed so many times, and this made it dangerous to get attached to any character except him, though I enjoyed most of

Red Rising

By Pierce Brown

Published by Del Rey

the other characters.

The class structure reminded me of the one presented in *Brave New World*, as members of the different castes, had genetics specifically suited to the labors and traits associated with their role in society. There are Reds, Violets, Obsidians, Blues, and other colors, and their eye and hair color often matches that of their class. Reds are small and meek with an average life-span of 40 years. Obsidians, the class of warriors, are typically ignorant and have large, muscular bodies. Golds are larger and stronger than most Obsidians and possess special cells that rejuvenate, allowing them to live unnaturally long lives.

I liked the first book so much that I immediately purchased the next two, *Golden Son* and *Morning Star* (coming from me, this is a huge sign of commitment). I was ecstatic that *Iron Gold*, the fourth book in the series, just came out this month. And there's a fifth book due this September. I feel like a spoiled nerd.

I'm at the beginning of the third book, and very pleased so far. I binged through the first book in a day, the second book lagged a bit in the beginning and middle, but a lot happens in the second half, so stick with it!

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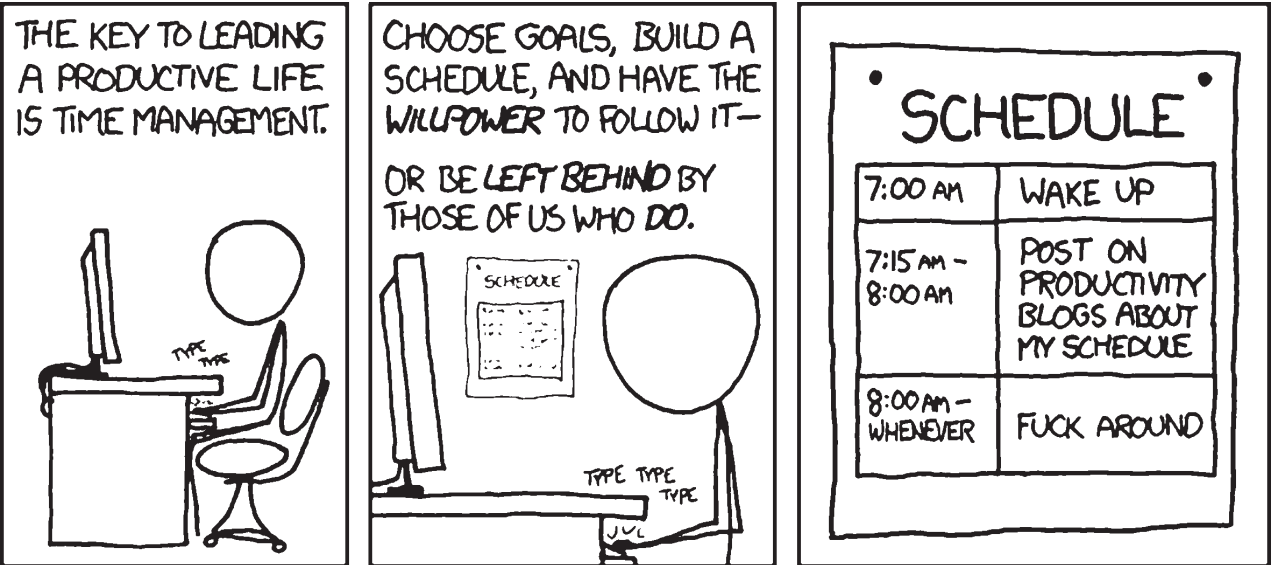
Rocky

Solution, page 12

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	27x			16x				9
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54x	3-		96x				14x	
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Instructions: Fill in the grid so that each column and row contains exactly one of each of the numbers 1–9. Follow the mathematical operations for each box.

[874] Time Management



I never trust anyone who's more excited about success than about doing the thing they want to be successful at.

Solution, page 12

23+			24+			22+	
12+			6		126x		11+
	384x					315x	
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[illegible]

